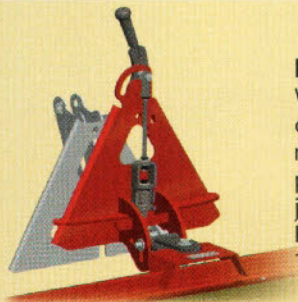


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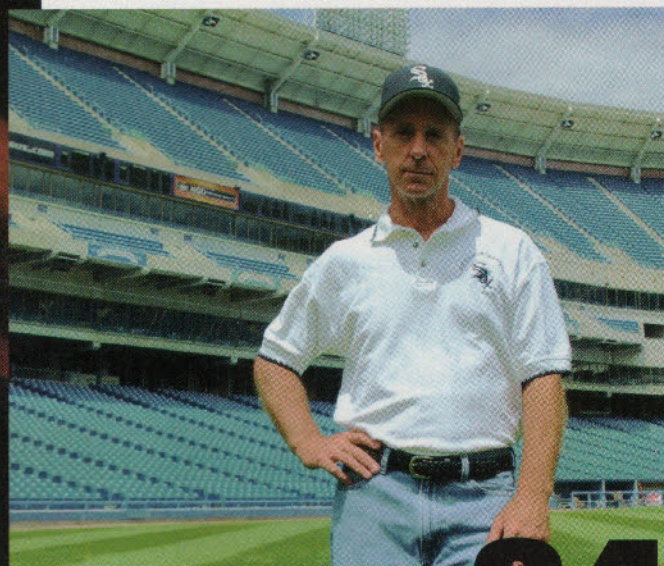
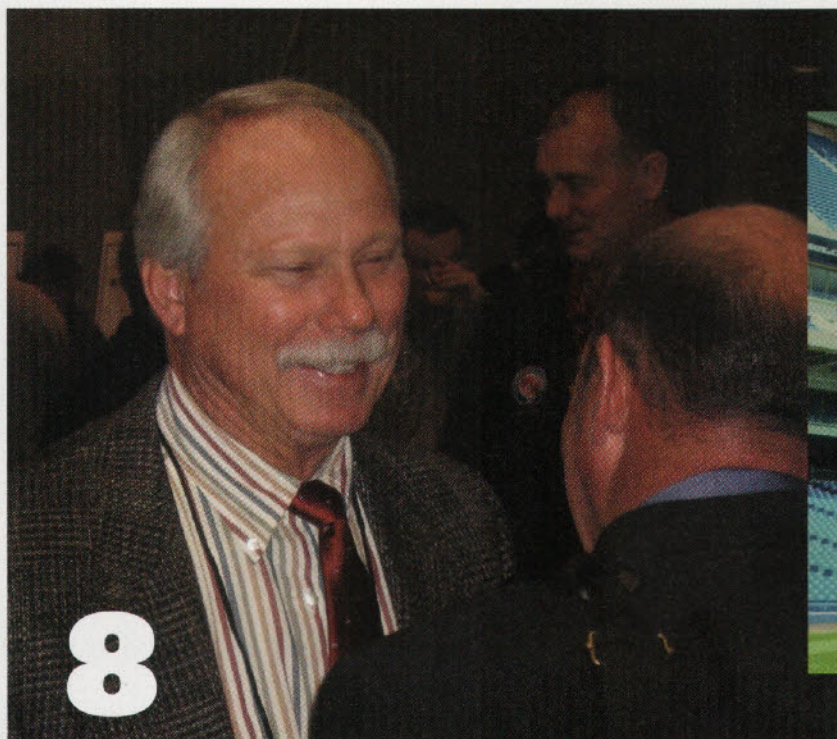
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On the cover: George Mason University's grounds crew, led by Josh McPherson, was honored at last month's Sports Turf Managers Association Conference for winning the 2007 College Softball Field of the Year Award.

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Turfsters' paradise in Phoenix



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I am all thumbs, unfortunately. Even while setting up our modest booth at the Sports Turf Managers Association Conference in Phoenix last month, I needed help. And my math and science aptitude might leave me challenged as a contestant on "Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader."

But attending the Conference makes me wish I was a turf manager anyway. You people really love your jobs and it shows, through the sharing of what works and what doesn't to the passion of wanting to be the best you can be.

Heck, even the sweatshirts and jackets you wear are cool, especially since most of them are unavailable to the public. I never fail to generate envious comments whenever I sport the maroon "Texas A&M Field Staff" T-shirt I snared at a SAFE Silent Auction a few years ago.

There aren't any similar meetings. Plenty of the best managers and researchers in the profession (the best on the planet, really) all gathered in one place yet in numbers that enable you to easily seek out individuals, whether it's to question an expert or buy a beer for a new friend. Mega kudos to the Conference Committees, Kim Heck and her staff at STMA headquarters, and David Rosenberg, Andrea Rollin, and Liz Zalewski from the STMA Show office.

The Jacobsen-sponsored golf tournament, which benefits SAFE (Foundation for Safer Athletic Field Environments), didn't get iced out this year but instead we had a chance to relax and enjoy the warm desert sun. Rumor had it that Jake's Monty Montague and his scoring system denied yet again a victory for Steve LeGros, Dan Douglas, Luke Yoder and Bobby Piccolo...

Another pre-Conference highlight was the Seminar on Wheels tour, which included a stop at the Super Bowl venue, where Tim Peterson of the Cardinals and the illustrious George Toma held court on the movable turf outside the stadium. Yes, I touched the turf on which Tom Petty walked!

Equally impressive was the Rio Vista Regional Community Park in Peoria. Not only were the fields looking good but there was a large skate park and a new community center, which features state-of-the-art workout equipment and a beautiful gymnasium. Heads were shaking when we learned that residents pay only \$25 a month for memberships. Chris Calcaterra, STMA treasurer and organizer of the tour, and his neighbors must pay an arm and leg in taxes to subsidize that place.

I don't have space here to describe the real meat of the Conference, the educational sessions and exhibit hall; rather, I suggest that you make preliminary plans now to attend next year's event in San Jose, CA. Sports turf managers are a lucky bunch to have these opportunities.

Now, where's my "Installing a light bulb" manual?

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The Official Publication Of The Sports Turf
Managers Association

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SportsTurf (ISSN 1061-687X) (USPS 000-292) (Reg. U.S. Pat. & T.M. Off.) is published monthly by M2MEDIA360, a Bev-AI Communications company at 760 Market Street, Suite 432, San Francisco, CA 94102. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to SportsTurf, P.O. Box 2120, Skokie IL 60076-7820. For subscription information and requests, call Subscription Services at (847) 763-9565. Subscription rates: 1 year, \$40 US & Poss.; 2 years, \$65 US & Poss.; 1 year, \$65 Canada/Foreign Surface, 1 year, \$130 Airmail. All subscriptions are payable in advance in US funds. Send payments to SportsTurf, P.O. Box 2120, Skokie, IL 60076-7820. Phone: (847) 763-9565. Fax: (847) 763-9569. Single copies or back issues, \$6 each US/Canada; \$9 Foreign. Periodicals postage paid at San Francisco, CA and additional mailing offices. COPYRIGHT 2007, SportsTurf. Material may not be reproduced or photocopied in any form without the written permission of the publisher.

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Moving forward

Wow! What a terrific Conference. Great weather, camaraderie, and education— just what we needed to get us ready for all the challenges of our next season. I thank everyone who was involved in the Conference. Our Conference education committee worked hard to bring our attendees excellent educational sessions, and our staff and marketing partners really made everything come together and flow flawlessly. I'd like to especially recognize Dr. David Minner, our conference education chair, for his work. His term on the board is complete, and he has really helped to grow and advance our educational program. Thanks, Dave!

I also want to thank Tra DuBois and David Rulli for their board service. Their terms are up, and STMA is in a better place because of their service. We are already planning for the 2009 Conference in San José. Our new Academic representative on the board, Dr. Mike Goatley, will take charge of steering the Conference education program. I have also appointed the 2008 Committee Chairs, and they will be helping me to place on a committee those of you who volunteered to serve. All Committee appointments should be completed by early March. Most committees conduct their work through conference calls. I am amazed at how much gets accomplished through these calls. Our committee system definitely works. Our committee involvement ties directly to our Strategic Plan, which we use to guide the operations of STMA.

As I continue into my second year as President, I feel gratified to see all that has been accomplished in 2007, but I see much opportunity for even more to be done this year. I am committed to providing more educational resources to help you easily find information to fit your needs. To help expand our educational offerings, your board has authorized the addition of an education-specific employee to our headquarters staff. Our organization is all about education, and now is the time to ensure that we are funding that initiative for success.

We also want our educational efforts to inform our employers and other sports audiences. Our message is that sports turf managers make a difference in athletes' performance and fan enjoyment. So, we are stepping up our public relations efforts, and will be rolling out a tool that can help you to publicly elevate your importance to your facility and to the sports world. Our board is committed to furthering our mission through our strategic plan. I encourage you to review the highlights of our plan in the members' only section of www.stma.org. As sports turf managers, we realize that STMA needs to be flexible and responsive to industry trends. I have initiated a process at our board meetings at which we do "environmental scanning." We look at various trends, issues, and technology with a view toward how these may impact STMA, positively or negatively. If you are aware of any potential issues, please contact me. With your help, we want STMA to be proactively leading our industry.



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State of the Industry, Part I: Grappling with Growth

By Bill Steele

In many ways, today's sports turf story can be written with a handful of dirt.

Once an unmanaged, hard-as-concrete area on most athletic fields, dirt is now lovingly cared for, treated with soil conditioners and other fancy

additives, and studied by soil scientists at top universities. Over the last decade, good dirt and soil management techniques have filtered down from the professional to the recreational sports level, and sales of related products and services have grown significantly.

Likewise, the sports turf industry is upgrading its surfaces from the ground up and reshaping the contours of its profession.

Enhanced communication, education, and technology has helped sport turf managers greatly advance the safety, performance, and aesthetics of sports fields at the same time that the public has come to appreciate the value of good playing surfaces. A new crop of degreed, hungry young people entering the trade has elevated the status of sports turf managers to the point where professionalism on par with the golf course superintendent is palpable for many in the industry.

These are promising times indeed for the sports turf manager and the nation's estimated \$11 billion athletic fields industry.

"Sports turf is changing so there's a lot of buzz in the industry," says Andy McNitt, associate professor of soil science/turfgrass at Penn State.

"In the last 10 or 15 years what's happened to this industry is pretty remarkable."

To examine what has been happening, *SportsTurf* recently contacted more than 25 sports turf managers, manufacturers, suppliers, and other experts to discuss important trends and issues facing the profession,

from compensation and certification to synthetic turf and water management. The result is a revealing snapshot of this sprawling, fast-moving industry.

Growing pains

By evidence of numbers alone, the sports turf industry today arguably is larger than golf in the overall U.S. turf and ornamental market. Although the golf industry spends an estimated six times more dollars per acre than sports turf, sports turf managers and other groundskeepers collectively maintain far more acreage. Based on 2005 figures provided by Penn State, for example, a total of seven million acres of turf (both natural grass and synthetic) is maintained by the sports field industry in the United States versus golf's estimated 1.7 million. That's more total land area than the state of Maryland.

Of course, the veracity of these kinds of figures is endlessly debatable. Depending on source and methodology, the picture can look far different. Case in point: a random survey of 75 sports turf managers taken last year by New Jersey-based Specialty Products Consulting, which analyzes the turf and ornamental market for chemical companies such



Dr. Andy McNitt, Penn State

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as Dow AgroSciences and Syngenta, found an average of 78.1 acres of turf supervised at each manager's facility. Multiply that by the estimated 30,000 athletic facilities across the country, including parks and recreation, and you get 2.3 million maintained acres. Looking only at turf maintained by members of the Sports Turf Managers Association (STMA), the number drops to roughly 185,000 acres.

But regardless of accounting, most industry observers agree that the athletic turf industry is expanding at a time when housing is down and golf remains flat. Though no hard numbers are available to verify this consensus, anecdotal support abounds.

"It seems like every midsize town in the country is putting in a recreational complex of some kind," says Mike Andresen, CSFM, facilities and grounds manager for Iowa State Athletics and current STMA President.

Andresen said that Iowa State is currently spending \$20 million renovating the university's Jack Trice Stadium, a natural grass facility, and adds that he sees many high schools improving their fields. Overall, sports turf managers are being handed better resources to manage than ever before, he said, and administrators are "starting to understand that it takes equipment and talented people to manage those facilities. I don't think this is happening just on the university level—it cuts clear across the board, from the park and recs to the professional level."

"What's really driving the industry, from top to bottom, for better quality of surface and better management, is multiple use."

—Dr. Hank Wilkinson, Turfgrass Pathologist at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

One reason why administrators are more interested in the quality of sports turf is that they need to get more use out of their facilities, says Dr. Hank Wilkinson, a University of Illinois turfgrass pathologist and sports field consultant.

"What's really driving the industry, from top to bottom, for better quality of surface and better management, is multiple use," said Wilkinson, who advised work on Wrigley Field's renovation last fall. "People want sports fields that they can use use use use use, and the quality remains the same."

Wilkinson contends that most administrators, however, don't understand that a strong management program is required for a natural sports field to hold up to the demands of multiple venues. Largely because of that, he says, artificial turf is viewed as the way to go instead.

"The mentality of 'mow it and fertilize it and water it,' they can't understand why they need to go beyond that," Wilkinson said. "Instead

of investing in management and maintenance, they give up the ghost right away and say we have poor managers, we have poor maintenance, so we'll get artificial and everybody can run a rug sweeper. So I see that's the main reason why artificials in the sports world are getting in."

Synthetics pile on

Looking back, the rebirth of artificials was difficult for many sports turf managers to foresee. Ten years ago, when improved 3rd generation synthetic rubber infills first began hitting the market, natural turf managers were happily dancing on the grave of AstroTurf, thinking they had won the war over synthetics.

They were wrong.

Thanks to improved technology, artificial turf has regrouped and made a counterattack. The Synthetic Turf Council, a non-profit advocacy group based in Atlanta, estimates that between 3,000 to 3,500 fields have been installed nationwide since 1998, and growth in recent years has been logarithmic. The latest figures available show that full-size (greater than 60,000 square feet) installations of synthetic turf for athletic fields in the U.S. increased approximately 100 percent from 2003 to 2005, from roughly 400 installations in 2003 to about 800 in 2005. Two-thirds of NFL teams play or can practice now on synthetic rubber infill and even Ohio State and Rutgers, well known for their turfgrass research, have synthetic turf on their football fields.



Chad Price, Carolina Green Corp.

Chad Price, President of Carolina Green, a sports turf contractor in Indian Trail, N.C., says that his company is installing more and more synthetics every year, and is starting to see school districts order them. "It's gone from a situation where only a few would have it, to now where it's really being considered in a lot more situations," he said.